881 the water and must remain in it a long time till the sun appears.
271 The shepherds prevent them from coming out. This is also said to help the wound to heal. (Valdo).

Thirst. It is absolutely forbidden to drink a drop of water during the whole initiation, and this taboo is said to be very painful. Boys sometimes succeed, during their hunting trips, in enticing their shepherds in one direction and in the meantime some of them escape and go to the river to drink. They will be severely punished if caught!

523 *Unsavoury food.* The law is that women, the mothers of the
881 circumcised, must bring plenty of porridge, twice as much as is required for the boys. Should one of them fail to do this she will be punished at a given time. They deposit their pots at some distance, so that they cannot catch any glimpse of the Ngoma, and shout: "Ha tsoo! We are burning." This means: "Our heads are sore from having carried our pots such a long way." Shepherds run to meet them and answer with a great many jokes in rather dubious taste: "We know what is burning with you, etc." Is not this the rule of the Ngoma? The shepherds bring back with them the empty pots of the day before which the women take back to their homes. Should one of them have provided too little food, her pot will be filled with long grass, and when she goes home with her comrades, they will make fun of her. If she does not learn to do better, the "Mother of the Ngoma" will organise a punitive expedition to her village, and kill goats and fowls, and thus make her obey.

881 All the food is placed on the reed tables, and must be eaten by the boys without any seasoning. Should the indulgent mothers have brought some ground nut sauce, it will be confiscated and eaten by the men. When they hear the order: "Tshai goma," the candidates must rush to the tables, kneel down, and, at the word "Thari," seize the food with both hands and swallow it as quickly as possible. If they delay, they are beaten by the shepherds who superintend the meal. When one batch of boys has finished, they must rush to another table where other boys are still struggling with their heap of porridge and help them to finish their portions. Owing to this emulation, the meal does not last

551 618 522 come to this conclusion after a careful investigation. Here are the only facts that I have discovered which may be said to be connected with totemic customs.

The first is that the shibongo sometimes gives an opportunity for *more or less witty jokes*. There is, near Rikatla, a clan called *Shibindji*. Shibindji means liver. When a man of this group meets with others who eat liver, they say to him : "Come along, we are going to run this skewer through you and roast you!" Another clan is the *Ntchekɔ*; this word means a tumbler or a small calabash with an elongated handle used for drinking purposes (p. 50). At the bukanye time, when everyone is getting these calabashes ready for the feast, they say : "Alas! poor creatures that we are! People are going to carry us from one end of the country to the other, to dip us into their pots and drink out of us!.." And so on. This is not totemism. I have however met with four more facts which must be mentioned, and which are very interesting.

618 551 177 1) In the neighbourhood of Pietersburg a Thonga who belongs to the Rikotcho clan, but whose shibongo is *Ñwangwenya*, the son of the crocodile, is said to "dance the crocodile" (tshina ngwenya). These Thonga words are the expression used by the Pedis to indicate their totemic customs, (ho bina kwena), not that there is any special dance or song performed in honoûr of the sacred animal ; this may have been the case formerly, but is not so now.

2) The laudatory name of the Nkuna clan is also said to be a *ntshupu*, though it does not imply any taboo. This word, which is unknown in other parts of Thongaland, corresponds to the Pedi *muthupu*, which indicates totemic animals. The Nkuna men like to be saluted by these words : "Nkuna! Homu (ox)! Nyari (buffalo)!" There are a number of Pedi tribes who "dance to the buffalo." Mankhelu assured me that, as the Nkunas have the same totem as these tribes, they have a common origin, and have come from the same place in Zululand. This assertion is so evidently erroneous that he could not maintain it. The old man had not the slightest idea of historical accuracy: he had only unconsciously drawn the conclusion of a common origin from a similarity of totem. Moreover, in his set of divinatory bones, he used to represent his own tribe by a small piece of ox bone, just in

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539 power belongs to me." Run, go and tell Mpapalati : "The power is mine." Run, go and tell Mulondjo : "The power is mine!" (1)

Such is the laudatory song of Mawewe, one of the great men at the Nkuna court. Undoubtedly this is one of the best examples of Thonga poetry and a characteristic piece of primitive literature. In the savage tribe the mbongi is the prototype of the poet laureate of civilised Courts. But there is yet another functionary to be considered, whose dutie sare still more strange than those of the herald.

IV. *The Public Vituperator.*

(Shitale sha tiko.)

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548 This is a kind of Court Jester who has the right of casting the vilest insults, the most disgraceful accusations in the teeth of any and all the Natives of the country. He never abuses strangers, but as long as he confines his vituperations to his own countrymen, he enjoys perfect immunity.

Even the chief is not safe from his attacks ; he dares to say anything! "Just see him arriving in your village," said Tobane to me, in his picturesque language. "He begins shouting out the most frightful things. He accuses you of incest, of taking your own sisters as wives! Even if he sees you talking to your 'great sister-in-law,' whom your wife's brother married with your oxen, whom you treat with the greatest respect, he will not hesitate to pass remarks which will make you blush with shame! He will go and take the food you are cooking, will even snatch from the chief's hands the meat he is eating... So, when you see him coming to your village, you hasten to meet him and take him a present to try and avoid having to listen to his horrible insults. Sometimes the *shitale* of the country behaves

(1) Quotation of the words of Muhlaba himself, who sent messengers to all his uncles, to all the petty chiefs under him, to announce officially that he had assumed the chieftainship.

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himself quite nicely, stays in his own village and attends the national assemblies as quietly as any other person, but, once he begins to rattle off his vituperations, beware! Nothing will stop him! He respects nothing, human or divine!" The Court Jester is of undoubted Thonga origin, as old as the tribe itself, according to Tobane. The position is official and even hereditary. At Zihlahla it was Nwachapane who held the extraordinary post of Public Vituperator. In Nondwane it was Mutjunkwa of the Shibindji family. He insulted the chief with the word : "Musathanyoko." There was also a woman who dared to do the same to Maphunga.

Phot. P. Berthoud.
Molwele, the dwarf.

It is difficult to understand the raison d'être of this strange institution. Is the *shitale* a public censor, to whom the tribe entrusts the privilege of calling attention to facts which others would not dare to bring to light ? Is there some analogy between this "fool" of an African Court and Triboulet ? (1) I cannot say.

(1) In this connection I reproduce from a photograph, taken at Shiluvane in 1885, the portrait of a remarkable personage who was not a Thonga but a Pedi, a subject of the chief Maaghe. Although this extraordinary dwarf did not act officially as the Vituperator, he was widely famed for his witty sayings and his incomparable mimicry. The Native Commissioner took him to Pretoria and Johannesburg some years ago as a curiosity, and it seems that he was exhibited for money ! The name of this little man is Molwele, a veritable ethnographic phenomenon, although he is not exactly the Public Vituperator of the country.